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The Balibo Declaration

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1. Introduction

On November 29, 1975, the day after Fretilin declared the independence of East Timor, four pro-integration parties declared East Timor's integration with Indonesia. This integration declaration is said to have been signed the following day in Balibo by six leaders of these parties and since then it has been called the "Balibo Declaration". This declaration, although later repudiated by some of those who signed it, continues to be referred to by Indonesia as a document which "constitutes a manifestation of the genuine wish of the people of East Timor in general" (*Lahirnya Propinsi Timor Timur*, p. 18). Indonesia's official national history even describes it in terms that suggest something that goes beyond a mere statement.

> This Proclamation in Balibo, besides constituting a reaction against Fretilin, can also be interpreted as the moment of the emergence of a new legal-order space in the former Portuguese colony. In other words, the Balibo proclamation became a new legal source and base established by the joint forces of Apodeti, UDT, Kota and Trabalhista. (*Sejarah Nasional Indonesia VI*, the fourth edition, p. 492) (my translation)

According to James Dunn, the integration declaration of November 29 was proclaimed in Atambua and in reality it "had been drawn up by Sugiyanto and Taolin" (Dunn, p. 277). (Sugiyanto was an Indonesian colonel and Taolin Bakin agent. Both were involved in *Operasi Komodo*.) Indeed little is known about the circumstances in which the declaration was drawn up and announced. It is difficult even to confirm that it was really signed in Balibo. The lack of evidence has made it difficult to take up the declaration as a subject of serious discussion.

As a modest starting point for discussion, this paper looks into several versions of the declaration and makes a brief survey of what are found in them. What follows below is necessarily more in the nature of conjectures than of definite conclusions.

2. The Texts

The CSIS (Centre for Strategic International Studies, the Indonesian think tank that has played a central role in the planning and execution of East Timor's integration) notes in its publication of the news clippings that the declaration was written in both English and Portuguese (*Dokumentasi Kliping ttg Pra-integrasi Timor*

Timur 1975, p. 73). I have not been able to find the Portuguese text. The texts I have seen are:

a. original English version and re-typed version
b. English UN version
c. CSIS Indonesian translation
d. Tomodok's Indonesian translation

a. A photocopy of the original version is found in the CSIS's *Dokumentasi* (p. 72) and a re-typed text in *Lahirnya Propinsi Timor Timur* (pp. 23-24). These are not exactly alike. While the photocopy would seem to retain every feature of the original text, the re-typed text omitted most accent signs and corrected the spelling errors of the original. The English in the original is indeed very poor, sometimes incomprehensible.

b. The UN version can be found in *Decolonization in East Timor*, a publication of the Department of Information of the Republic of Indonesia (pp. 73-74). This is a completely revised text in perfect English and without the signatures of the six leaders. The revision here is not limited to grammatical adjustments but goes to the extent of making substantial changes.

c. This translation is found on the reverse side of the photocopy of the original English version (p. 73), but it is not clear when and by whom it was made. I call this the "CSIS translation" simply because it is found in *Dokumentasi*. The translation is adequate, though some parts could have been more precise.

d. This translation is found in E. M. Tomodok's memoir, *Hari-hari Akhir Timor Portugis* (pp. 307-309). Tomodok is a former Indonesian consul in Dili between 1972 and 1976 and wrote the book "to try to counter opinions of the international community and ceaseless intrigues and attacks of Fretilin and the Portuguese government which without stopping continue to raise the problem of the integration of East Timor". The translation is generally accurate though not completely free from mis-interpretations.

3. Why A UN Version?

It is obvious that the original English version was hastily made. It is full of spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, inappropriate or incomprehensible word choices and internal inconsistencies. These irregularities invite speculation about the circumstances of the document's creation. Indonesia may have wanted to avoid such speculation by removing problematic sections of the original in the document meant for the eyes of the international community. The UN version in a sense is a completely new document and it is indeed surprising to find it registered as an official document at the UN.

Two omissions in the UN version are worth noting.

The first is a criticism of the Portuguese "consent" to Fretilin's action. The original version, in the very first paragraph, criticizes Portugal for giving its consent to the unilateral declaration of independence by Fretilin, although Portugal did not in fact do

so. The UN version does not mention "consent", but only vaguely refers to "the attitude of the Portuguese Government concerning it". Then, the UN version continues, what "contradicts the real wish of the people of Portuguese Timor" is the "unilateral action by Fretilin" alone.

The Indonesian news agency *Antara* reported on November 29 that the Indonesian government, in a press release, had criticized the Portuguese government for "clearly signalling an approval of the Fretilin's action of unilateral proclamation of independence". Apparently the Balibo declaration echoed this view. On December 1 *Antara* reported that "the unilateral declaration of independence by Fretilin which was approved by Portugal is a clear violation of the Memorandum of Understanding in Rome", and quoted UDT leader Francisco Lopes da Cruz as saying "therefore, we too regard ourselves not bound anymore by the Rome agreement".

This is important, because the disappointment supposedly felt by the drafters of the declaration originates in the actions of two parties, Fretilin and the Portuguese government, and this perception appears to be what led the drafters to conclude that there was no longer any possibility for negotiations. After this *Antara* report, however, the Indonesian government never described the Portuguese attitude as one that expressed or implied approval of Fretilin's action. At the UN Indonesia condemned only Fretilin for ignoring efforts by both Indonesia and Portugal.

The omission of this reference to the Portuguese "consent" in the UN version, therefore, is significant. It allows Indonesia to conceal the fact that one of the two grounds on which the basic arguments of the declaration were built was misinformation. This misinformation is highly likely to have come from the Indonesian side.

The second omission to note is that of any mention of "Holland". The original version attributes the separation of East Timor and West Timor (!) to two colonial powers, Portugal and Holland, and it says that the two parts of Timor had been separated for almost 500 years. The UN version, however, speaks in terms of a 400-year separation of East Timor from Indonesia, a separation it attributes solely to Portugal.

The danger to Indonesia of trying to defend the former line of argument is clear, for it is a line that could also be used to justify the unification of East and West Timor without any reference to Indonesia at all. Moreover, from Indonesia's point of view, it is logically dangerous to place Portugal and the Netherlands on an equal footing in any historical discussion, for to do so would invite the logical next step, juxtaposition of Indonesia and East Timor on an equal footing. Thus for Indonesia's purposes, only Portugal should be singled out for mention. This allows Indonesia to prepare the most congenial theoretical grounds for argueing East Timor's "return to the fatherland", i.e., integration with Indonesia.

So much for the omissions; now let us look at the additions in the later document.

The first is mention of "independence" (in para. 5). In the original version the four parties simply declare integration straight off, but in the UN version the drafters declare "the independence and integration of the whole former colonial Territory of Portuguese

Timor with the Republic of Indonesia". Perhaps Indonesia felt that, for formality's sake, it looked better to declare independence before declaring integration.

The other significant addition is the phrase, "our statement to the Portuguese Government" (in para. 3). It is not clear what this refers to, but without is, the phrase that follows, "all these good efforts" (which had "again been sabotaged by FRETILIN") would refer solely to the efforts of non-Timorese (i.e., the governments of Portugal, Australia and Indonesia). While the actions of FRETILIN, despicable as they may be portrayed to be, are very prominent in both versions of the declaration, in the original version there is no suggestion whatsoever of any active involvement in events by the pro-integrationists. Indonesia must have sensed the vital weakness of an integration declaration purporting to be that of pro-integration Timorese asserting their right to act on behalf of their entire nation that spoke only of the "efforts" of outsiders, non-Timorese.

4. Who Wrote the Original Version?

The original version gives us many hints about how it was made.

The text may have been typed by a non-Timorese or Indonesian who was not familiar with Portuguese. The accute accent (acento agundo) in "Democratíca" is placed in the wrong position. ("Democrática" is correct.) We find the same error twice, so the typist was being consistent. It is hard to believe that the Timorese political leaders who signed the declaration could have made this kind of error, particularly because it occurs in the names of their own parties.

Inconsistencies in choosing words suggest that the declaration may have been composed by more than one person. The question of Timor is written in one place as "the timorese question" and in the other place as "the Timor question". The people of Portuguese Timor is referred to as "the People of Portuguese Timor", "Portuguese Timor People", "the Timor Portuguese people" and "The Portuguese Timor people".

In grammatical patterns and choice of words the text shows traces of both Portuguese and Indonesian.

The relative pronoun "which" of line 16 should be "whose". But Portuguese speakers rarely make this kind of mistake since Portuguese has "cujo" (here, cuja) which stands for "whose". Indonesian does not have a declention of the relative pronoun "yang".

The words "materialized" (Indonesian 'terwujud') of line 4, "Dated" (Indonesian 'tertanggal') and the passive construction of the last sentence may also be interpreted as Indonesian traces.

But the text as a whole shows more Portuguese traces. The frequent use of the gerund (-ing), the preposed verb (being) in a gerund construction such as "being such attitude considered", "being such facts in full contradiction" and "being achieved the conclusion that ...", and the post-verbal positioning of adverbs are signs of Portuguese influence. The word "during" (Portuguese 'durante') of line 29 and the uncapital country name adjectives like "timorese" and "ex-portuguese" are mistakes of the kind

Portuguese speakers often make.

However, the part about the four initiatives has a slightly different touch both in style and content. While the rest of the text is full of elementary mistakes, this part contains only a few such elementary mistakes other than the use of "which" already pointed out above. With respect to content, this part is more an Indonesian argument than a Timorese one, because no mention is made of the position of the pro-integration forces in relation to the four initiatives.

The fourth initiative is particularly strangely laid out on the page. Does this suggest that this part was too hastily added, for the dispatch of Adam Malik was an event of the very same day as the proclamation signing, November 30?

The last sentence raises questions. A native speaker of Portuguese told me that a Portuguese speaker would start this sentence with something like "we request...", thus not using the passive. This sentence is the most essential part for Indonesia in justifying its military intervention. If this sentence was not composed by a Timorese but added by Indonesia, it dramatically changes the meaning of the declaration.

5. Final Remarks

I have tried to show the possibility, and the importance of doing research on the Balibo Declaration. Indonesia has attempted to pass this off as an historical document which reflects the genuine wishes of the people of East Timor. This claim is, I believe, invalid, but it will continue to be used as long as the truth about the declaration is not exposed.

References

Antara reports from *Warta Berita*. *Warta Berita* of this period are available at the library of the Osaka University of Foreign Studies.

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Dunn, James, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, the Jacaranda Press, 1983.

Noor, Machmuddin et al, *Lahirnya Propinsi Timor Timur*, Badan Penerbit Almanak Republik Indonesia, Jakarta, 1977.

Notosusanto, Nugroho et al, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia VI*, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Balai Pustaka, Edisi ke-4, cetakan keenam, 1990 (cetakan pertama 1984).

Tomodok, E. M., *Hari-hari Akhir Timor Portugis*, Pustaka Jaya, 1994.

Appendix I / Original English version
from Berita Yudha, 4 December 1975

PROCLAMATION

We, the People of Portuguese Timor and its Dependencies, herein represented by APODETI-Associação Popular Democratíca de Timor, UDT-União Democratíca de Timor, KOTA-Klibur Oan Timur Aswain and Partido Trabalhista after a crefully analise has been made after the unilateral action of Fretilin materialized through the "proclamation of independence" concerning the territory of Portuguese Timor, being such attitude considered consented under the role of the Government of Portugal, being such facts by their meanings in full contradiction to the real interest of Portuguese Timor people;

Considering that the conditions for self-determination of Portuguese Timor people regarding to choose freely its own destiny were not carried out in execution;

Having in mind the fact that several initiatives have been evidenced as a proof towards to meet a just and peaceful political solution on the timorese question, mainly

- The Macao Meeting to which Fretilin was voluntariously absent although the Government of Portugal did invite their representatives to be present.
- Readiness of the Government of Austraila in order to provide conditions for a dialogue concerning the Timor question at its own territory.
- The Rome Meeting for mutual consultations held between the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia which final conclusion was the issue of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries.

Efforts carried out by the Indonesian Government in sending over the bordering area the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Adam Malik in order to implement the spirit of the Rome Meeting.

Consequently, being achieved the conclusion that the Fretilin deliberatly ignored all the mentioned efforts;

Adding yet the fact that Fretilin has assumed illness attitudes that criminally avoid the Timor Portuguese people to express its legitimate aspirations;

Attending the situation build up by Fretilin when declaring unilateraly the independence of Portuguese Timor draining out completely at the possibilities towards a peaceful solution of this problem according to the wishes of the people;

Feeling that owing the colonialist action of Portugal and Holland which during almost 500 years has deeply separated the blood links, ethnical afinities moral and cultural with the Indonesian People of the island of Timor;

Attending that this moment is to be considered quite opportune to re-establish the strong traditional links with the Indonesian Nation;

In the name of the All Mighty, and by the reasons previously referred, we do proclaim solemnly the Integration of the whole territory of the ex-portuguese colony of Timor with the Indonesian Nation, as this proclamation means the most highly expression of the Portuguese Timor people feelings.

In accordance with the contents of the present Proclamation of Integration the Government of Indonesia and the People of Indonesia are requested to take the necessary steps in order to protect people's lives who themselves now are considering part of the Indonesian People yet living under the terror and fascist practices of Fretilin allowed by the Government of Portugal.

Dated at Balibó, November 30, 1975

A/C.4/808
English
Annex

BALIBO DECLARATION

Enclosure

PROCLAMATION

After having carefully studied the unilateral action by FRETILIN in issuing its so-called "Proclamation of Independence", of Portuguese Timor and the attitude of the Portuguese Government concerning it, which clearly contradicts the real wish of the people of Portuguese Timor to exercise an act of self-determination on the future of Portuguese Timor, we the peoples of Portuguese Timor represented in APODETI, UDT, KOTA and the Partido Trabalhista, hereby state the following:

1. We are strongly against the unilateral action by FRETILIN as it clearly violates the principles of decolonisation agreed upon by the Portuguese Government and the three political parties of Portuguese Timor.

2. It has been evident so far that FRETILIN has not shown a genuine desire for a peaceful solution of the problem of Portuguese Timor. For example, FRETILIN refused to participate in the Macao meeting. Precisely at this stage, during which all peace loving parties are doing their best to bring about the holding of negotiations such as the Rome meeting between Portugal and Indonesia recently which produced a Memorandum of Understanding, the readiness of the Australian Government to provide a venue for the talks subsequently, efforts by the Indonesian Government to send specially its Foreign Minister, Mr. Adam Malik, to Atambua within the framework of implementing the spirit of the Rome meeting, and our statement to the Portuguese Government, all these good efforts have again been sabotaged by FRETILIN with its unilateral action. This ill-intentioned attitude on the part of FRETILIN has forced us, the people of Portuguese Timor, to act.

3. The new situation created by the unilateral action of FRETILIN has excluded the possibility of finding a way out through a peaceful solution to determine the future of Portuguese Timor in accordance with the real wishes of Portuguese Timor.

4. After having been forcibly separated from the strongest links of blood, identity, ethnic and moral culture with the people of Indonesia by the colonial power of Portugal for more than 400 years, we deem it is now the right moment for the people of Portuguese Timor to re-establish formally these strong ties with the Indonesian nation.

5. In the name of God the Almighty, we therefore solemnly declare the independence and integration of the whole former colonial Territory of Portuguese Timor with the Republic of Indonesia, which is in accordance with the real wishes of the entire people of Portuguese Timor.

6. We also urge the Indonesian Government and people to take steps immediately to protect the lives of the people who now regard themselves as Indonesians, yet are still suffering due to the terror and fascist practices of the FRETILIN gang, armed and supported by the Portuguese Government.

Done at Balibo, 30 November 1975

Appendix III / Indonesian translation
from CSIS, Dokumentasi Kliping
ttg Pra-integrasi Timor Timur 1975, p. 73

PROKLAMASI

Kami, rakyat Timor Portugis, yang diwakili oleh APODETI - Associacao Popular Democratica de Timor, UDT - Uniao Democratica de Timor, KOTA - Klibur Oan Timur Aswain and Partido Trabalhista, setelah mempertimbangkan dengan seksama aksi sepihak Fretilin yang terwujud melalui "proklamasi kemerdekaan" mengenai wilayah Timor Portugis, yang dinyatakan disetujui oleh pemerintah Portugis: kenyataan semacam itu bertentangan dengan keinginan nyata dari rakyat Timor Portugis.

Menimbang, bahwa persyaratan untuk menentukan nasib sendiri secara bebas dari rakyat Timor Portugis tidak sesuai dengan tindakan tersebut.

Mengingat kenyataan, bahwa beberapa inisiatip telah ditempuh untuk memperoleh penyelesaian politik secara damai dalam masalah Timor, terutama:

--- Pertemuan Makkao, dimana dengan sengaja Fretilin tidak hadir walaupun Pemerintah Portugis mengundang wakil mereka.

--- Kesediaan Pemerintah Australia untuk mengusahakan keadaan yang memungkinkan bagi pembicaraan tentang masalah Timor di wilayahnya.

--- Pertemuan Roma untuk saling konsultasi antara para Menteri2 Luar Negeri Portugis dan Indonesia, yang telah menghasilkan Memorandum Saling Pengertian di antara kedua negara.

--- Usaha yang dilakukan oleh Pemerintah Indonesia dengan kedatangan Menlu Adam Malik ke daerah perbatasan untuk menyampaikan semangat Pertemuan Roma.

Akibatnya tercapailah kesimpulah, bahwa Fretilin dengan sengaja tidak mau tahu semua usaha-usaha tersebut;

Tambahan lagi Fretilin telah mempertunjukkan sikap salah, bahwa dengan tindakan kriminalitasnya telah menghalangi rakyat Timor Portugis untuk menyatakan kehendak berdasarkan hukum yang syah;

Mengingat situasi yang disebabkan oleh Fretilin dengan pernyataan sepihak kemerdekaan Timor Portugis telah menggagalkan segala kemungkinan kearah pemecahan damai seperti yang diingini oleh rakyat;

Merasakan, bahwa aksi kolonialis Portugis dan Belanda yang selama hampir 500 tahun telah memisahkan hubungan darah, ikatan moral bangsa dan kebudayaan antara Bangsa Indonesia dan Timor Portugis;

Mengingat, bahwa saat ini adalah kesempatan yang paling baik menyambungkan secara kokoh hubungan tradisi dengan Bangsa Indonesia;

Atas nama Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, dan dengan alasan2 di atas, kami dengan khidmat menyatakan penyatuan seluruh wilayah bekas koloni Portugis di Timor dengan Negara Indonesia; Proklamasi ini adalah pernyataan paling sungguh dari keinginan rakyat Timor Portugis.

Berhubung dengan isi dari Proklamasi Penyatuan ini, Pemerintah Indonesia dan rakyat Indonesia diminta untuk mengambil langkah-langkah yang perlu untuk melindungi kehidupan rakyat, yang kini merupakan bagian Bangsa Indonesia, yang berada di bawah terror dan fasis yang dilakukan oleh Fretilin dan direstui oleh Portugis.

Balibo, 30 Nopember 1975.

PROKLAMASI

Kami, rakyat dan jajahan Timor Portugis, dalam hal ini diwakili oleh Apodeti, UDT, KOTA dan Partido Trabalhista, setelah mengadakan analisis yang seksama sesudah aksi sepihak Fretilin yang diwujudkan melalui 'proklamasi kemerdekaan' wilayah Timor Portugis, yang menempatkan diri di bawah kekuasaan Pemerintah Portugal, dan yang dalam segala hal bertentangan dengan kepentingan nyata rakyat Timor Portugis.

Mengingat bahwa kondisi untuk pelaksanaan hak penentuan nasib sendiri rakyat Timor Portugis tidaklah disiapkan secara sah;

Mempertimbangkan fakta bahwa sejumlah prakarsa sudah diusahakan sebagai bukti adanya kehendak untuk memperoleh penyelesaian politik yang adil dan damai sesuai dengan tuntutan orang Timor, misalnya;

Pertemuan Makao yang tidak dihadiri oleh wakil Fretilin meskipun Pemerintah Portugal sudah mengundang mereka untuk hadir.

Kesiapsediaan Pemerintah Australia menyiapkan kondisi untuk menyelenggarakan dialog tentang masalah Timor di wilayahnya sendiri.

Pertemuan Roma untuk konsultasi-konsultasi timbal balik antara Menteri Luar Negeri Portugal dan Indonesia yang kesimpulan akhirnya adalah *Memorandum of Understanding* antara kedua negara.

Usaha-usaha yang diupayakan oleh Menteri Luar Negeri Indonesia di dalam mengosongkan daerah perbatasan untuk mengimplementasikan semangat Pertemuan Roma.

Secara bertanggungjawab mengambil kesimpulan bahwa Fretilin dengan sengaja mengabaikan semua upaya yang diuraikan di atas;

Lagipula fakta menunjukkan bahwa cara-cara perjuangan Fretilin yang keliru dan bersifat kriminal, menjauhkan rakyat Timor Portugis dari perjuangannya untuk mewujudkan aspirasi-aspirasinya yang sah;

Memperhatikan situasi yang dipaksakan oleh Fretilin ketika memaklumkan secara sepihak kemerdekaan Timor Portugis yang menutup semua kemungkinan ke arah penyelesaian secara damai permasalahan yang berkaitan dengan keinginan rakyat;

Merasakan bahwa warisan kolonialis Portugal dan Belanda yang selama hampir 500 tahun memisahkan hubungan-hubungan darah, afintities etnis, nilai-nilai moral dan kebudayaan rakyat Indonesia di Pulau Timor;

Memperhatikan bahwa pada saat ini dapat diharapkan suatu kesempatan untuk memantapkan kembali hubungan-hubungan tradisional yang kuat dengan bangsa Indonesia;

Dengan nama Allah dan demi alasan-alasan yang telah dikemukakan, kami memprokamasikan dengan sesungguhnya integrasi seluruh wilayah bekas koloni Timor Portugis dengan bangsa Indonesia; pernyataan ini merupakan perwujudan nilai-nilai paling dalam rakyat Timor Portugis.

Berkenaan dengan isi Proklamasi Integrasi ini, pemerintah dan rakyat Indonesia diharapkan untuk mengambil langkah-langkah yang diperlukan akan melindungi kehidupan rakyat yang sekarang menempatkan dirinya sebagai bagian dari rakyat Indonesia, namun yang masih hidup di bawah teror dan praktek-praktek fasis Fretilin yang dibenarkan oleh Pemerintah Portugal.

Dibuat di Balibo, 30 November 1975